

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method of providing fee-based access to grid computing resources available to a plurality of users, comprising:
  - receiving a request from a requesting entity;
  - routing the request to the grid computing resources;
  - determining an amount of time needed to perform the request by the grid computing resources; and
  - determining a price to be charged for performing the request based on the amount of time.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising charging the price for performing the request.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising, prior to performing the request, allocating resources from the grid computing resources to perform the request.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising, prior to performing the request,
  - determining availability of a sufficient portion of the grid computing resources to perform the request; and
  - if the sufficient portion is unavailable, waiting until the sufficient portion becomes available.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein performing the request comprises producing results responsive to the request and wherein determining the amount of time needed to perform the request comprises determining an amount of time needed to return the results to the requesting entity.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the price to be charged comprises accessing a tiered pricing schedule from which the price is determined based on request processing time, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for the request with an increasing request processing time.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the price to be charged comprises accessing a tiered pricing schedule from which the price is determined based on response time, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for the request with an increasing response time.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.

10. A method of providing fee-based access to grid computing resources available to a plurality of users, comprising:

- receiving a request from a requesting entity;

- determining a completion time criterion specified for the request, wherein the completion time criterion defines at least a maximum acceptable time to complete the request;

- performing the request using the grid computing resources; wherein performing the request comprises producing results responsive to the request;

- if an amount of time needed to perform the request is less than the maximum acceptable time to complete the request defined by the completion time criterion, delaying returning the results to the requesting entity for a period of time;

- after a lapse of the period of time, returning the results to the requesting entity;

and

- determining a time-based price to be charged for performing the request.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein determining the time-based price to be charged for performing the request is based on a span of time calculated from receiving the request to returning the results.
12. The method of claim 10, wherein the completion time criterion defines a minimum acceptable time to complete the request, and wherein delaying returning the results is done only if the amount of time needed to perform the request is greater than the minimum acceptable time and less than the maximum acceptable time.
13. The method of claim 10, wherein returning the results occurs before a lapse of the maximum acceptable time as calculated from receiving the request.
14. The method of claim 10, wherein determining the time-based price to be charged comprises accessing a tiered pricing schedule from which the price is determined based on request processing time, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for the request with an increasing request processing time.
15. The method of claim 14, wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.
16. The method of claim 10, wherein determining the time-based price to be charged comprises accessing a tiered pricing schedule from which the price is determined based on response time, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for the request with an increasing response time.
17. The method of claim 16, wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.

18. A computerized environment, comprising:
  - grid computing resources; and
  - a request manager configured to:
    - receive a request;
    - route the request to an appropriate resource of the grid computing resources; and
    - determine a price to be charged for processing the request based on an amount of time needed to process the request, wherein the price varies with respect to the amount of time needed to process the request.
19. The computerized environment of claim 18, wherein request manager is configured to determine an increasing price with a decreasing amount of time needed to process the request.
20. The computerized environment of claim 18, further comprising a database containing at least one tiered pricing schedule defining different prices to be charged for processing requests based on time and wherein the request manager is configured to access the at least one tier pricing schedule to determine the price for processing the request.
21. A computerized environment, comprising:
  - grid computing resources;
  - a database containing a plurality of customer service contracts each containing a respective tiered pricing schedule defining different prices to be charged for processing requests based on time;
  - a request manager configured to:
    - receive requests;
    - route the requests to appropriate resources of the grid computing resources; and

access the tiered pricing schedules to determine a price to be charged for processing each request, wherein the price varies with respect to the amount of time needed to process the request.

22. The computerized environment of claim 21, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for each request with one of (i) an increasing request processing time and (ii) an increasing response time.

23. A computerized environment, comprising:

grid computing resources; and

a request manager configured to:

receive a request for results;

determine a completion time criterion specified for the request, wherein the completion time criterion defines at least a maximum acceptable time to complete the request;

route the request to an appropriate resource of the grid computing resources to perform the request;

upon completion of the request by the appropriate resource, determine a total elapsed time since receiving the request;

determine whether the total elapsed time is less than the maximum acceptable time to complete the request defined by the completion time criterion;

if so, delay returning the results to the requesting entity for a period of time; and

determine a price to be charged for processing the request based on an amount of time needed to process the request and return the results after the delay.

24. The computerized environment of claim 23, wherein the completion time criterion defines a minimum acceptable time to complete the request, and wherein the request manager is configured to delay returning the results only if the amount of time needed

to perform the request is greater than the minimum acceptable time and less than the maximum acceptable time.

25. The computerized environment of claim 23, wherein returning the results occurs before a lapse of the maximum acceptable time as calculated from receiving the request.

26. The computerized environment of claim 23, further comprising a database containing at least one tiered pricing schedule defining different prices to be charged for processing requests based on time and wherein the request manager is configured to access the at least one tier pricing schedule to determine the price for processing the request.

27. The computerized environment of claim 26, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price with an increasing response time.

28. The computerized environment of claim 26, wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.